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Mary Diane Hausman

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They Never Were

by Mary Diane Hausman

A familiar figure ambled from the woods, to the trail, and back into the woods again.

"I'd shoot that bastard if I had half a chance," said Darcy, glaring after the man.

"Boxer don't mean no harm." John Clay's defense of Boxer astounded Darcy.

"I know you're my brother, John Clay, but sometimes you are just too stupid for your own good!"

"And you're just too sensitive, that's what you are," retorted John Clay.

"You just don't get it, do you, big brother? There ain't no call for what Boxer done."

"I'm gettin' chigger bites, is what I'm gettin'." John Clay scratched his jean-covered thigh and pulled his feet out of the creek water. He reached for his socks and boots.

"I never could win for losin' with you anyhow, Darcy. C'mon, let's go pop some bottles."

Boots on, John Clay stood up to his full five feet, five inches and reached down a hand to Darcy. His .22 pistol stuck out from the shoulder harness underneath his hunting vest.

"You're gonna knock me in the face with that goddamn thing!" Darcy scowled, but he grabbed his hand and stood up. She pulled her own boots on, cursing the late October heat.

"Damn Indian Summer'll be here till Christmas," she muttered.

"Hell, you ought to be glad. 'Sides, it's good hunting weather."

"Don't even talk to me about hunting," Darcy said to John Clay's backside as they climbed up the creek bank to the trail. Darcy loved to shoot, but had never taken to hunting. She just didn't get the idea of a sport where an armed man was up against a soft-eyed doe or graceful buck. Forget about food. None of the hunters she knew, including John Clay, needed to hunt

for food. She thought it was just an excuse for the thrill of killing. Now you take Boxer, *there* was something that deserved to die.

They turned north, toward the town dump, where they had been going since they were kids to shoot empty beer bottles. Years ago they had up-ended an old car fender to set their bottles on. It was still there, as was just about every other hunk of junk Darcy could remember. The dump wasn't used much anymore, since the new one had been dug out across Interstate 35. Just as well. Darcy and John Clay considered this place their special territory.

Darcy strode restlessly alongside John Clay. Her .44 magnum bounced slightly from the shoulder harness she had rigged around her waist. "Gets in the way of her tits," John Clay laughingly explained to friends. But left-handed Darcy simply felt more comfortable drawing from her waist than her chest. And she just didn't feel like buying a holster. John Clay often tried to talk her into it, but she'd shrug and remind him, "It ain't never caused me to miss a shot and it never will. So you can just shit fire and save the matches, and leave me the hell alone."

She was still stinging from John Clay's defense of Boxer as they rounded a curve in the trail and came upon the dump. John Clay ran down the slope, picking over and under trash in search of unbroken bottles, not an easy task. Darcy looked back south, thinking of Boxer. She wished she could just forget about him, at least for today. But seeing him brought up the familiar rush of anger.

"Shit! I can't even come out here for a day to relax without that idiot ruining it for me!"

"Shutup and find your bottles," John Clay called good-naturedly.

Darcy started down the slope, a torrent of



memories flooding her head. She and Boxer had gone to school together. They were a grade behind John Clay, but the three of them were inseparable. Not by Darcy's choice. She never did like Boxer. Where John Clay tolerated Boxer's antics and tagging along, Darcy was always yelling at him to get away from them.

Boxer's idea of fun was stringing cats on barbed wire fences and punching girls in the mouth. He knew not to mess with Darcy; she was bigger than John Clay and made no bones about what she would do to Boxer if he ever tried to punch her. John Clay always thought Boxer was, well, just Boxer. Darcy thought that when God gave out good sense, Boxer must've been jerking off his tallywhacker out behind the barn. He ended up quitting ninth grade and never went back to school.

But Darcy could care less about Boxer's education. And she had long given up on his redemption. What she cared about and what haunted her to this day happened almost a year earlier. She had been making her rounds of the southern pasture and dawn was just skirting the eastern horizon as she edged her Blazer around the curve of Farm to Market Road 1223. An old station wagon zig-zagging down the road ahead of her caught her attention.

She thought the driver must be drunk, but as she drew closer, she recognized the junk heap as Boxer's. He must've been hunting—she could make out the shape of a deer over the hood of the wagon. Its head and antlers sagged over the front grill.

"What the hell...?" she asked the air as she realized there was something erratically moving in the road in front of Boxer's car. She slowed down until she was at least twenty yards behind him. He didn't seem to notice her, so intent was he on the thing in the road. She watched as he braked every few seconds, stepped on the gas, lunged ahead, then braked again.

As Darcy drew closer, she saw something half-stumble and half-run, never quite making

it out of the way of the antlers sticking out over the hood of the wagon. As the sun broke over the eastern ranch land, Darcy made out the figure of a woman. The Blazer was now a pick-up's length behind Boxer. Still he didn't notice her.

Darcy caught his laughter, a raucous "Yeee-haw!" as he madly swerved the car left, then right, taunting the stumbling woman.

By now, the Texas sun, another hot October ball of fire, glared across the road. Cussing, Darcy gassed the Blazer, slamming her hand on the horn as she did. She screeched to a stop on Boxer's side, narrowly missing his left swerve.

"You crazy son-of-a-bitch! What the hell's going on?" She rammed the Blazer into park and jumped out.

Boxer's face fell as she ran around the truck, arm already outstretched to yank open his door. It never occurred to her that Boxer would take off. He lunged the wagon to the right and gassed it full force, almost running her down. Darcy was amazed that the old rattle-trap had that much get up and go.

She stared in astonishment after black exhaust smoke. It was a full minute before she remembered the woman Boxer had been playing his insane game with. The woman, who couldn't have been more than twenty, if that, sat huddled on the pavement, sobs shaking her body. She looked up for a second, shrinking back, not realizing her tormentor was gone. Only fear registered in the sunken, brown eyes.

Darcy squatted beside her, taking in the ripped skirt and blouse, the girl's left breast protruding from the torn, red-patterned cloth. Darcy's rage mounted when she saw the girl's scraped and bleeding legs; there were black pavement pebbles embedded in her shins from falling.

She lightly touched a bruised arm. "C'mon, girl, we got to get you out of the road, at least." The girl slumped against Darcy, unable to help



pull herself up.

"Mmm. Mmm!" Darcy shook her head slowly from side to side. "Well, it's over now. Let's get you into town."

Darcy wasn't about to press for details yet. That could wait. It occurred to her that Boxer might have raped the girl. She sure wouldn't put it past him.

She stood up and moved around behind the limp body, stooped and lifted the girl by her armpits. She dragged her backwards to the Blazer and struggled with the passenger door as she tried not to drop the girl. Finally, she had her on the seat. The girl slumped against the door as Darcy closed it.

Behind the wheel again, Darcy floored the Blazer, quickly closing the three mile gap to the sheriff's office.

"You got a name, girl?" Darcy asked gently. There was no answer from the limp body next to her.

"Well, you have had a time of it, haven't you?" Darcy noticed a silver locket around the girl's neck. The sunlight glinted on filigree. No piece of tin, that, Darcy thought. Her emotions bounced back and forth between rage at Boxer and wonder about this girl. Darcy knew just about everybody in the county and all their kin. This ragged-looking girl didn't resemble anybody she knew. Maybe she was a runaway from Austin. The girl still slumped against the door, her sunken eyes closed.

Sheriff Conroy was just pulling out of the gravel drive in front of his white, gabled office as Darcy pulled up.

"Morning, Darcy Jean," he said through a lip full of Skoal snuff.

"Good thing you didn't say *good*. We got us a problem here, Sheriff," Darcy replied.

Sheriff Conroy walked over to the Blazer and peered in.

"Oooh-weee! What the hell happened to her?"

"Well, I'll tell you what happened to her. But first I'd like you to go round up Boxer Tate. He's what happened to her, that's what!" Darcy spat out the words. "Meanwhile, I'll get her over to Inez's and get her fixed up."

"Now wait just a damn minute here, Darcy. So happens that Boxer was by here just a little while ago. He come to tell me he caught some girl trying to untie that buck he shot whilst he was takin' a piss off the side of the road. Says he hollered at her to quit and she started coming at him with a knife. So he jumped in his car and she got knocked down when he took off 'cause she tried to get in his door after him. Says he thought I ought to know, in case she messed with anybody else. I was just on my way over to 1223 to take a look-see."

Darcy stared at the lined, tanned face. The man she had known since she was a kid might as well have been a stranger in front of her.

"If that ain't the goddamndest thing I ever heard!" She shook her head. "I'd a never thought Boxer had enough sense in him to make up a tale like that. And you believed him?"

"Well now, I ain't got cause not to. Boxer may act like somebody knocked him upside the head with a two-by-four, but I ain't never knowed him to lie," Sheriff Conroy said without much conviction.

Darcy fumed. "Well, here's cause not to believe him, sittin' right here big as Dallas in my truck!" Then Darcy spewed out what she had seen not more than an hour ago. All the while, the girl never changed her position against the truck door, never spoke a word.

"Look, Sheriff, I think she might a been *raped*!" Darcy finished her story with her biggest concern.

"I don't know, Darcy Jean. You sure the sun was up? Maybe you just saw Boxer driving away and the girl running after him. And if'n she was raped, you don't know it was Boxer. I just don't think that boy would do something



like that.”

“Well, if this don’t beat all! Shit fire, Sheriff! I *know* what I saw.” Darcy was stunned. “To hell with you! I got to get this girl to Inez.” Darcy wasn’t usually disrespectful to her elders, but she didn’t give a damn right now.

She stormed away and got into her truck. Gravel and dust flew up as the Blazer squealed onto the road. The sudden movement caused the girl to fall over the gearshift. Darcy pushed her upright as gently as she could.

“Don’t you worry, Missy. We’ll get that son-of-a-bitch.”

Darcy found Inez Watson in her backyard, feeding her chickens. Inez was wearing the same apron around her waist that Darcy had watched her bake cookies in for her and John Clay after school. Inez’s house was near the school bus stop, and she always made cookies for the kids to take home. She favored Darcy and John Clay, especially after their mama died.

“Come on out here and help me, will you, Inez?” Darcy was already pulling the girl out of the Blazer as Inez came through the old iron gate to the drive.

“My goodness, Darcy Jean! What happened to her?”

“Let’s get her cleaned up first, then I’ll tell you all about it, Inez.”

Inside the clapboard house, Inez quickly put a pot of water on to boil. She never had gotten around to getting hot water pumped in, and she didn’t see much point to doing it now. She was going on eighty-five and had gotten on without it this long.

Darcy settled the girl’s still body on the couch, figuring she must have passed out from all the trauma. She went to the oak linen cabinet and pulled out several towels, then pulled Inez’s house robe off a hook on the bathroom door.

It was evening before the girl finally opened

her eyes. Nothing seemed to register at first. She looked curiously at the worn, cotton robe covering her body. She touched the bandages on her legs and groaned as she tried to sit up.

Darcy started up out of the rocker she’d been in for hours. Inez motioned for her to stay put.

“You want some tea, honey?” Inez’s voice soothed Darcy, if not the girl.

Still not a word.

“You think she’s a deaf-mute?” Darcy whispered.

“No, I do not. I think she’s scared out of her wits,” Inez said matter-of-factly.

Darcy leaned back in the rocker. She felt stiff and hollow. She wished she hadn’t refused the fried chicken and greens Inez offered earlier for supper.

“Darcy, why don’t you go on home? I’ll take care of her and later we can talk to Sheriff Conroy.”

“I don’t think it’s going to do much good to talk to Sheriff Conroy,” Darcy said. She had been racking her brain all day to figure out what she should do. The girl had no identification on her, just a twenty dollar bill in the pocket of the short, tight skirt.

“Now Darcy, don’t worry so. You never did have a lick of patience. This’ll work itself out, you’ll see.”

Darcy stood up and walked to the couch. The girl had fallen back to sleep. Her dishwasher blonde hair lay matted against her head. Darcy sighed, then turned to Inez.

“You’re right. I better get on home. John Clay’s probably fit to be tied, wondering where I am.”

As Darcy pulled the Blazer up the drive, John Clay flung open the back screen door and ran out to the truck. She knew she should have called, but she hadn’t felt like explaining the whole thing to him over the phone. John Clay was a rush in a whirlwind when he got excited





Photo courtesy Tirito.com

over something, and she had needed Inez's quiet strength to regain her own. Besides, Inez didn't have a phone, and she would've had to drive over to the sheriff's or to Sonny's Cafe in order to call him.

She got out of the truck and walked up the drive.

"Dammit, Darcy! Where the hell you been? It's way past supper time. I was gettin' worried!"

She walked silently up the concrete steps into the kitchen. She tossed the truck keys onto the speckled Formica counter, then leaned against it and braced herself for John Clay's onslaught of questions. But he just sighed and looked at her expectantly.

"Well, I've had a hell of a day. We can start with that." Then she continued on through the whole episode of the morning, from sighting Boxer's car, to leaving the girl with Inez.

John Clay stood with his mouth open as she finished in anger. Then he started asking for every detail. After an hour's worth of questions and answers, Darcy finally insisted she had to get some sleep. She knew John Clay would

have kept her up all night with the questions he kept repeating, "Are you sure, Darcy? Boxer's a little weird, but...?"

A couple of hours later, as she lay on her bed taking in the night breeze through the window screens, she thought she might as well have stayed up with John Clay. She couldn't sleep. She just kept seeing Boxer ramming those grotesquely angled antlers at the girl. She was furious at John Clay for questioning her story's validity. He had always trusted her; he had no

reason not to now. She had screamed at him, "What, all you people think I made up this cockamamie story?"

She now felt bad about unleashing her fury on John Clay. But what the hell did he think anyway? She didn't all of a sudden go blind this morning. She saw what she saw. And no telling what would've happened to that girl if she hadn't come along.

Darcy wanted to find Boxer herself. She swore she'd kill him if she ever laid hands on him. But no one even knew where Boxer lived. He just had a knack for showing up out of the blue.

He used to live with his parents a few miles out of town, in the old Peterson farmhouse. A couple of years back, the house caught fire and burned to the ground. Boxer's parents never got out. Boxer had not been home. Darcy had her suspicions about how that house burned. People used to ride by at night, before the fire, and tell how they could hear Boxer cussing his old daddy and mama up one end and down the other. At any rate, Boxer didn't have a steady



address since then. Some folks figured he lived in his station wagon. That and his hunting rifle were the only possessions he seemed to have.

Darcy decided to call the state highway patrol first thing in the morning. And she'd have to get that girl to a doctor to see if she had been raped. She fell into a fitful sleep just before dawn.

Darcy arrived at Inez's about eight o'clock that morning. She walked into the house feeling like she'd been hit by a Mack truck. Her long brown hair was haphazardly tied behind her head with a leather thong. She hadn't even bothered to pull her jeans down over her boots. Inez stood inside the door, expecting her.

"Morning, Inez. How is she?" Darcy looked toward the couch.

Inez wrung her hands in her apron. She looked straight at Darcy and broke the news. "Darcy, she done took off." Her voice rang with disbelief.

Darcy said nothing, just walked past Inez to the couch. The robe lay there along with the red blouse they had taken off the girl. That was all.

"Where did she go? How did she get up? Did she talk?" Darcy was beginning to sound like John Clay with her stream of questions.

"She was up before me. I heard her out here and came on out. She put her skirt back on and that robe. She gave me this." Darcy took the neatly folded paper from Inez's hand. It was Inez's own stationery. In a childish hand, the girl had written a request for a shirt and directions to the nearest bus station. After that she wrote: *Please give this to that lady in the truck. It was my mama's. I did not mean to cause nobody trouble so I will leave.* Darcy looked up as Inez handed her the silver locket the girl had worn around her neck.

For weeks afterward Darcy searched the surrounding towns and counties trying to locate the girl. No one claimed to have seen her.

The bus stop to which Inez had given the girl directions was over in San Marcos. Darcy could only guess the girl had hitchhiked there by way of the state highway.

Darcy told people what Boxer had done, but she finally got tired of their shrugs and the frequent comments, "Oh hell, Boxer's crazy but he ain't *that* crazy." "Girl was probably no account anyway, and what the hell was she doin' on the road that time of morning?"

Darcy was appalled at her friends' responses. The sheriff said it was better off, all things considered. He figured the girl would've ended up with the short end of the stick had he tried to arrest Boxer. Not that he even intended to, Darcy thought. Inez said it was best, too. That hurt. But what hurt Darcy most was John Clay's question, "Are you sure, Darcy?"

It took a while, but Darcy finally put the locket around her neck and never took it off. Although there was no picture inside, the memory of the girl with the sunken eyes was so etched in Darcy's mind that she imagined the girl's face whenever she opened the locket.

Now here she was, a year later, still venting hate on Boxer when she ought to just get on with her day and find her bottles. John Clay had already shot a full round while she was in her reverie.

"You gonna shoot or just stand there like a dimwit, Darcy?" he called.

She picked two unbroken bottles out from under a rusted piece of metal. She held up her hand for John Clay to hold his fire as she walked over to the fender and placed the bottles on top. She walked back and stood beside John Clay. Before he could open his mouth again, she drew her gun and shattered both bottles.

"I will never figure out how in the hell you do that!" At least he still admired her ability to shoot.

"You don't have to figure it out. Just watch it!" She grinned at him, her hazel eyes, twins



of his, catching the sunlight.

They found enough bottles to shoot two more rounds apiece, then John Clay said, "I got to get. Supposed to go over to Jake's and help him pour cement for his new drive. I can take you home first." They had driven to the dump in John Clay's pickup.

"That's okay. I could use the walk."

"Suit yourself! See you at home." John Clay smacked her on the back and took off up the slope and down the trail.

She sure could use the walk, she thought, as she climbed out of the dump on the south end. She needed to shake the memories she had dredged up. She decided to turn west and go home the back way, through the wooded area that ran along the creek.

Stubborn gray-green leaves still clung to the live oaks. She breathed in cedar and mesquite as she walked lazily along. This trail would bring her out to then southwestern part of the pasture and from there it was only another mile's walk to the house. Suddenly, as she stepped over a hunk of driftwood, she caught site of something moving in the brush off to her left. She stooped to peer under the cedar trees. Anger caught in her throat as she recognized the plaid shirt and filthy jeans.

Boxer stood against a live oak, grinning stupidly, as he swung a lizard back and forth by its tail, watching it squirm and twitch. Before Darcy could stop herself she had drawn the .44 from the harness and wrapped both hands around the handle.

"Well, well. Boxer. If this isn't somethin', findin' you here like this." Darcy spoke low, but Boxer heard.

He looked up, fear all over his face when he saw the gun. He dropped the lizard without another thought. Darcy figured he would try to run, so she stepped off the trail, less than ten feet from him.

"Darcy, you ain't gonna shoot me?" Boxer's

voice was high pitched with fear, his eyes on her gun.

"I just might be your judge and jury, since you never got one, you bastard!"

Darcy parted her feet, and honed the gun in on Boxer. She aimed just below his neck, where his pulse throbbed wildly in his throat. Her finger tenderly pressured the trigger. She braced herself for the kick, anticipating the shock wave of needles that would reverberate up her arms from the Magnum.

God, this is so easy, she thought. She wondered if it was this easy for John Clay and his buddies to shoot a deer or pick off a rabbit. She guessed it was. Her eyes filled with hate for Boxer and she wondered if there was hate in a hunter's eyes when an animal stood perfectly still staring back with eyes full of fear? She realized her mind was wandering. A voice from somewhere in her head told her to put the gun down and walk away, told her she had no business here like this.

It was only seconds, but it seemed like hours that she had been standing there, her gun aimed at Boxer. Suddenly, she blinked as Boxer's angular face grew outward, elongating, the mouth and nose coming closer together. She blinked again. I'm hallucinating, she thought. I'm taking too long, and I'm hallucinating.

"Just pull the trigger, goddammit," she scolded herself out loud. By now, tawny hair covered what was once Boxer's pimple-scarred face. The brown eyes grew larger, fringed with long lashes. The forehead sloped forward, and where seconds ago Boxer's right ear had been, there grew a long curved jaw. It, too, was covered with tawny hair. And higher up on each side of the quickly changing head, ears twitched. Large, deer ears covered with short, light-brown hair. The huge fear-filled deer eyes stared at her.

"What the...?" Darcy blinked again. The deer's head, sticking impossibly out of Boxer's



plaid shirt, was still there. As she watched, the huge brown eyes changed. No longer pleading with fear, they were filled with an impenetrable sadness.

Darcy still held the gun at the neck, her arms frozen. She was just about to try and lower her arms, thinking she had unquestionably lost her mind, when the head became Boxer's again.

Darcy found her voice. Hoarse, it sounded far away in her own ears. "Go, damn it." Boxer didn't move. Fear once again defined his face.

"I said Go! Get the hell out of here before I change my mind!"

He blinked once at the gun, still pointed at him, then stumbled away from the tree. He quickly turned and broke into a run through the woods. Darcy could hear brush cracking beneath his boots. Slowly, she lowered the gun. It seemed to weigh twice as much as it should. She carefully placed it in the harness. She shook her head as she walked back on the trail. Her eyes ached, and she suddenly had trouble breathing. She looked up to see a couple of buzzards circling overhead. She sucked in the clear, hot air and walked on up the trail.

The stove clock claimed it was nine-thirty as Darcy sat at the kitchen table, her fingers wrapped around a cup of cold coffee. She had walked up and down the creek for an hour or so before coming back to the house. By then, it was sunset. She had been sitting at the table since she came in, going over the afternoon in her head. It seemed like a bizarre dream. She was still trying to shake the numb feeling in her arms and wondering just what exactly in God's name had happened.

She wondered why she had not pulled the trigger. A voice inside her told her Boxer sure as hell wasn't worth going to prison for. Another voice said, *They'da never proved it was you*. And so went the troubled dialogue in her head, giving her no peace for the rest of the

evening.

She stared past the bugs swarming around the porch light outside, wondering where in hell John Clay was. Probably stopped off at Sonny's for a beer and tacos. John Clay complained that Darcy wasn't a bit like their mama when it came to cooking.

"Hell, you're lucky I ain't," Darcy teased him. "Unless you mean to tell me you liked greasy meat and greens!" Actually, they had settled into a more-or less-comfortable routine of fending for themselves for meals.

As if her thoughts had summoned him, John Clay burst through the screen door, white as a ghost. Darcy, startled, spilled coffee all over herself and the table.

"Damn you, John Clay! Can't you *walk* in like normal folk?!"

He ignored her scolding. "You ain't gonna believe this, Darcy!" He sputtered, "They done found Boxer, shot, out on 1223!"

"What?" Darcy stiffened.

John Clay grabbed the kitchen counter, breathing hard. He went on, "Sheriff Conroy found him in the woods off the road, deader'n a doornail."

"What happened? When?" Darcy could barely get the words out.

"Sheriff brought him in just after dusk. Said he couldn't a been dead too long. He says he thinks it was a hunter! Says Boxer was probably out wandering around the woods like he does and somebody just thought he was a deer. Hunter must've took off when he saw it wasn't." John Clay stopped, took a deep breath and blew it slowly out, shaking his head. "Imagine that, Darcy? God, I can't believe it! Poor old Boxer!"

He rambled excitedly on again, oblivious to Darcy as she clutched the locket around her neck. The girl's bloody shins and sunken eyes flashed across her mind, followed by Boxer's face in the shape of a deer's head. She squeezed



her own eyes tight, fighting back emotions of exhaustion, relief, and she didn't know what all.

The day of Boxer's funeral was just as blue and cloudless as the day he was shot. John Clay was among a handful of locals who showed up at the small, white Baptist church out on the edge of town. He stood uncomfortably behind the last pew and listened politely as Pastor Daryl Higgins gave a surprisingly brief and unemotional eulogy. Toward the end of the sermon, John Clay felt a brush against his arm. He turned, startled to see his sister.

"Didn't think you'd show, Darcy, what with how you felt 'bout him and all."

"Let's just say I had a change of heart." Darcy looked up, above Pastor Higgins' head, avoiding Boxer's plain casket. She stared for a moment at the painted stained glass of the blue-eyed, blonde-headed Jesus kneeling at the rock of Gethsemene. She pictured the baptismal pool, hidden from view behind the faded velvet drapes. She thought of the time she pushed Boxer under water in that pool one summer day after vacation Bible school.

She had pretended she was the preacher. Lord knew if anybody needed saving, it was Boxer. Actually, she only did it to scare the living daylights out of him so he'd stop stealing the smaller kids' pocket Bibles.

"Humph." She shook her head with a half smile.

"Now what are you thinkin'?" John Clay whispered.

"Too damn much, that's for sure." She noticed that Pastor Higgins' voice had stopped droning and the small crowd was heading toward the door. "Let's get out of here." Darcy started for the swinging double doors.

John Clay shoved his hat down on his head as he walked down the cement steps. He stopped on the walk and stared past the barbed wire fence strung alongside the highway.

"Hell, Darcy, even the woods ain't safe no more."

Darcy started toward her truck. "I got news for ya, John Clay." She turned and looked back at the church. "They never were."

